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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY PLANS TO REARRANGE ITS FACULTIES

MELANIE KING (HOST): We're going to talk about Concordia today. Concordia University is really an amalgamation of two formerly independent universities: Loyola College and Sir George Williams University.

Sir George Williams was the great concrete campus downtown, at the corner of de Maisonneuve and Bishop, and kind of grew by leaps and bounds. They took over this building and that building and that building and it kind of grew and mushroomed and Loyola was this lovely, kind of West End campus with trees and picture book campus.

But they have amalgamated, they amalgamated about fifteen years ago to become Concordia University. Now the problem seems to be the move of some of the Arts and Sciences faculties out to the Loyola Campus. Joining me are two people very much against the move, Myer Verthuy, who is a Resident Fellow and and Associate Professor of French at

the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, and Ed Pechter, a professor of English at Concordia University. Good afternoon to you both.

ED PECHTER (CONCORDIA ENGLISH PROFESSOR): Good afternoon.

MYER VERTHUY (CONCORDIA FRENCH PROFESSOR): Hi Melanie.

MELANIE KING: Well, Myer, let's start with you. Why are you against this?

MYER VERTHUY: Well, it would almost be easier if you asked my...

MELANIE KING: Maybe I should start again. Why do they want to move some of the faculties to Loyola.

MYER VERTHUY: Yes. One can only wonder why, because I can't think of any good reasons. Somebody asked me that question the other day and I still can't think of any good reasons.

I think the main reason probably is that the administration was outmanoeuvred by the Jesuits once again and bought the high school on the Loyola Campus, and having bought it, wondered what to with it.

This is not how I run my household budget you understand! But apparently the administration can run the University that way.

MELANIE KING: Well, I have here something from the Concordia Thursday Report, which is a draft of a strategic

space plan, put out by Catherine Mackenzie. By the way, I should let our listeners know that we have asked Dr. Mackenzie for an interview and she has refused.

MYER VERTHUY: Yes.

MELANIE KING: But anyway, this indicates that Concordia is growing by leaps and bounds and they need more space. They did buy Loyola High School, which I was quite surprised to find out, in fact, and they needed more space, and what they were going to do was take some of the faculties and move them out to the Loyola Campus. Why not?

MYER VERTHUY: Well, I think we should say, why should they? What they're doing is leaving downtown, or bringing downtown, the faculty of Engineering, the faculty of Science, the hard sciences, all the faculties that are glittery, glitsy, and that bring in millions of dollars from the outside...

MELANIE KING: Engineering and Science are glitsy?

MYER VERTHUY: Yes, they are. They're glitsy in the sense that they're money-makers. They bring money in from outside and they produce people who are going to make money. And they are then being given the main Hall Building. I have no particular objection to that.

But then these are very male-oriented campus, faculties and departments, and so we're going to have a high male profile in the Hall Building and in the new library building

opposite it.

What then happens is that the Social Sciences and the Humanities, where there is a much higher percentage of women faculty and a majority of women students, are being shunted out to what will then be seen as a backwater.

Once you put the money-makers in the central building and put the others five miles away, then you're making a very strong statement about what's important and what's not important.

MELANIE KING: The two campuses though were always distinct. It was not like some English classes were here and there was a duplicity. There were always two distinct campuses.

ED PECHTER: No, it is a double operation, so that the, there are English courses downtown and there are English courses at Loyola and that's generally true...

MELANIE KING: But it's not like you can take an English course at Loyola but if you don't want to travel to Montréal West, then you can take the same English courses at Sir George.

ED PECHTER: Basically that's true. You can be more or less at the institution, at the campus, where you want to be. It's not totally true. In some cases, you have to shuttle, but for the most part you can be centred at the campus where you want to be, and I think that's really the

central issue.

Where you want to be, you being the students. There's overwhelming evidence that the students want to be, want to study Arts at Concordia downtown.

For ten years, we've been under relentless pressure from the administration of the University to move courses out to the West End Campus, and we've largely complied with this pressure. We've tried very hard to lure students from downtown out to the West End and we failed.

They haven't come. They haven't come because they don't want to come, or to put it in a more positive way, they want to study Arts downtown.

One of the disastrous consequences of this report, one among many, is that it's going to result in an enormous erosion of the enrollment in the Arts faculty. Another very disastrous consequence of this report is that it constitutes a terrible betrayal of the downtown community.

For a long time, really going back fifty years to the origin of Sir George Williams University, the social mission of first Sir George Williams University and now the downtown part of Concordia University has been to serve the downtown community.

I don't mean just the people who live downtown. I don't mean just the mature students who work downtown and want to study downtown. It's a very diverse community.

It's a very loyal and lively community, and the effect of this report is to take that institution that has served that community faithfully for fifty years and relatively well, if I say so myself, and take that institution away from that community.

I don't need to remind you that we're losing our institutions, by we I mean, "ce d'entre nous qui ne sont pas Québecois de souche", we are losing our institutions left, right and centre these days. It's one thing when we lose them owing to political concerns over which we have no control. But when one of our own people, when one, an administrator talking to his own people at Concordia...

MELANIE KING: I'm not a professor at Concordia like you guys are, I feel this is an over-reaction. It seems to me, looking at it from an outsider's point of view, they just want to move some courses here and some faculties there and fine, what's the big deal?

MYER VERTHUY: Well, I'd like to address that, if I may. First of all, they shouldn't have to want to do. It's only because there's been mismanagement, I think, that they're in a position where they have to do that.

There would be a lot more space downtown if the number of support staff and administrators hadn't tripled and quadrupled in the last ten years, occupying space that could otherwise be occupied by faculty and students.

What's happened in the University in the last ten years is that what used to be an institution for faculty and students has become an institution for administrators, where faculty and students serve the needs and whims of administrators rather than the administrators being there to help teaching and learning move smoothly.

I would like to say also that I am considered to be one of the best teachers in Concordia, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Concordia, the John O'Brian Award for Excellence in Teaching was given to ten full-time faculty, out of a thousand, and I am one of ten. I'm...

MELANIE KING: Congratulations.

MYER VERTHUY: Thank you very much, and I moved out to Loyola in 1983 for two years in order to encourage collegiality because it seemed important that we establish much better relationships with people out at Loyola, and indeed it, for many people it's a pleasant campus.

The students are pleasant, I got to know my colleagues better, but the students from Sir George did not follow me. The very students that are supposed to think I'm the best teacher took other courses with other people rather than come out to Loyola.

It's a fact of life. It's something that you can deplore. That doesn't mean that Loyola is not a good campus. Loyola is a good campus for people who like that

campus. It is not a good campus for people who prefer a downtown atmosphere. It's particularly not a good campus for people, the evening students, especially the evening students, who see another hour and a half being added to their evening out at the University, because they have to get out to the Loyola Campus and get back.

It is not a pleasant campus for women who have to cross that campus after dark. One of my students asked me last night, are you going to have, is your, are your evening classes going to given out at Loyola next year? I said, I wish somebody would tell me, because no one is telling me anything! And she said, well, I'll wait until you find out, because I'm not going to take evening classes out there, it's too scary.

And that's just an immediate reaction from a student. And I don't, I feel that we are betraying these students. We are betraying the women students, we are betraying the people that have no money and no fast cars to get them out to Loyola. We are betraying the cultural communities. We are betraying all sorts of people by doing this.

MELANIE KING: Do you suggest I mean, being upset about the move, and you mentioned earlier male-dominated courses will be downtown and so on, that they switch, have the female-dominated courses downtown, have the male-dominated courses in the West End and then nobody will be upset about

crossing the campus.

MYER VERTHUY: Well, I don't particularly want to be involved in deciding for other people who is going to move. I think it would be a major error if they moved Humanities and Social Sciences out to Loyola Campus and I don't want to turn that round and say...

ED PECHTER: Right.

MYER VERTHUY: ...say I want to shaft somebody else. The idea is not to shaft people! We can run a dual campus operation. It may be slightly more expensive. Experience would tell us that if you're going to close anything, alas it should be Loyola, because certainly in our department both in Women's Studies and in French, we maintain courses on that campus at much lower enrollments than downtown, but I don't want to do that either.

The University is there to serve learning, but it is also there to serve people. And I think therefore that we should operate a dual campus operation. I would like to add, before we say anything else, that the University has done no market research. So this is not good business, this is not planning, this is not strategic anything. No company would plan anything like this without major research in advance to find out what the market is going to be or how the market is going to affected.

IBM would never move its employees or anything like

this without first running some surveys and consulting everybody, from the ground up and keeping them informed every step of the way...

ED PECHTER: Myer, didn't they consult on this matter right from the beginning and seek our input?

MYER VERTHUY: Are you kidding? Let me have a laugh. You know perfectly well that this information just leaked out. And it was because it was leaked that the report was finally produced.

ED PECHTER: You mean this committee in secrecy and systematically withheld the...

MYER VERTHUY: Well, isn't that amazing?

MELANIE KING: I get the point, you have a statement to make, just come out and say it. Don't do this. You're upset about the way it was handled, fine, come out and say that you are upset about the way it was handled. Now, the situation is, is this going to be accepted by the University?

ED PECHTER: Well, you're asking Myer and me. You should really be asking the Rector, Patrick Kenneth, you should really be asking the Dean of Arts, the people who refused apparently your invitation to come to speak to you today.

There is massive resistance to this plan amongst the faculty, not limited to the faculty in Arts downtown, but

including faculty throughout the University.

Whether this report is accepted or not depends upon the responsiveness of this administration to the objections, the resistance, and the reasoned objections that are being made to this plan.

MELANIE KING: Any draft proposal, whether it's for a University moving a campus or anything else, is very often put to a vote either by a board of directors or by professors or by students, I mean, certainly, three people in the administration aren't going to make this decision and off you go.

MYER VERTHUY: Well, they can, in effect. They can put this to the Board of Governors and say, there is no dissent, and get it through the Board of Governors. There is not a democracy in the University in that sense of the word.

The decision in effect has been made behind closed doors. They may call this a draft report, but the intention is to make a report to the Québec government by May, so that it's being rammed through. They're hoping to ram it through.

And I think they're, they were very surprised once it leaked that there was so much dissent. And we are very grateful to the media for giving us this coverage, so that we can bring it to the attention of the public and indeed to the Board of Governors.

MELANIE KING: Joining me on the telephone is Ken Whittingham, who is director of public relations for Concordia University. As I mentioned, Dr. Catherine Mackenzie, the Assistant Vice-Rector who wrote this report has declined to be interviewed by us.

Mr. Whittingham, good afternoon.

KEN WHITTINGHAM (CONCORDIA DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC RELATIONS): Hi Melanie.

MELANIE KING: Obviously you've heard that your colleagues are unhappy about this move. What is the...

KEN WHITTINGHAM: Yes.

MELANIE KING: What is the official line of the University?

KEN WHITTINGHAM: Official line, basically this is an interim report. I know your guests and a great many other people do believe it's absolutely carved in stone, but the point is, as I think you pointed out at the beginning of the interview, that the University has grown by leaps and bounds, and there's never been any sort of rational way of allotting space.

So they, a mandate was given to six professors to sit down and to try and come up with some criteria that could be used not just this year or next year, but over the next five years, the next decade, a criteria that would be used by whoever the decision-makers are to determine where

various departments should be, be placed.

And I guess in a nutshell, it's hard to summarize a massive report in a few words, but this committee of professors, after deliberating, decided that probably the most logical way to do it would be to group departments or units together that share similar needs. And if that is not to be adopted, and that's the purpose of this consultation period, if that philosophy or that criteria is not to be the primary criteria used, then we're hoping the community will put up some alternate suggestions.

MELANIE KING: You mean to suggest then that any faculty member, any student who is opposed to this move has a right to make their feelings known in a public way, or in a written way?

KEN WHITTINGHAM: Oh very much so. I think Professor Verthuy just said that the committee was probably very shocked at the response. I haven't put that question to them, but I am quite sure that they were very well aware that there would be a very visceral response to their suggestion.

There are going to be public meetings tomorrow and Friday. Now those in themselves I don't think are of tremendous importance, but the committee basically had a twelve week time span to come up with this report and there is approximately another twelve weeks to get input from the

community, from individual professors, from deans, from senate, from anybody at the University.

And all of that information will be funnelled into the committee and it may indeed stick with the report as it is, which is the fear of your guests and many others, or indeed they may drastically revise it and say that there are very valid reasons that have been produced by the community which show that the plan is nonsense.

MELANIE KING: Well...

KEN WHITTINGHAM: There may be some combination there of.

MELANIE KING: What do you think, Ms. Verthuy?

MYER VERTHUY: Well, I hear the administration speaking very clearly in this particular issue. Mr. Whittingham does speak for the administration, and therefore is to a certain extent repeating what can only be considered to be a party line, I think.

I think it's untrue that the committee expected a visceral reaction. I think the committee was set up in order to draft a report behind closed doors and whip it past the Board of Governors as fast as possible, and that they assumed that they could play with people's lives and play with the lives of the students as well as the faculty without any reaction whatsoever, because they wanted, I think, to confront us with a done deal.

And it's only because there's been a certain amount of uproar about it that, that they are now proceeding to some form of consultation. The fact remains that these mythical deadlines are in here somewhere.

You know, the committee had twelve weeks...Who decide the committee had twelve weeks? There are now twelve weeks left before we do this...Who decided there were only twelve weeks left? And why should we now have to scramble to do anything at all in reaction to a behind closed doors deal made by some committee set up by the administration without consultation.

This is a typical sort of power play, you know. We make a decision, you can have five minutes of input, or the equivalent thereof, you know, and then we'll go ahead and do...

KEN WHITTINGHAM: Can I comment on any of that, or?

MELANIE KING: Yes, okay, hang on. Mr. Whittingham, Mr. Pechter has a comment and then it'll be your turn.

ED PECHTER: Yes, well, I can just second what Paulia(sic) had to say, that these were six people who were chosen by the power vested in themselves by themselves, to make a report, and they're the same six people who will decide what weight to give to the objections and resistances to the report, and they will make the decision.

That's simply no way to run a widget factory and it's

certainly no way to run a university. I think the alternative now is to withdraw this report and for a statement to be made, an honest statement of the reasons behind this report.

There must be some serious problem to which this report is being addressed. Nothing is certainly said in the report.

But if these reasons are made public, there's still a residium of good will at Concordia, a surprising reserve of good will, considering how badly we've bashed around by the administration, but it's still there and we can work together in the open as a community to solve our problems.

MELANIE KING: Mr. Whittingham?

KEN WHITTINGHAM: Well, in terms of six people making the decision, they certainly will not. Only one of them has any influence per se in the administrative process, and that is the chair of the committee.

ED PECHTER: Who refused to come.

KEN WHITTINGHAM: The normal political process will unfold as it should, as it's taking place right now. The report will go to a Vice-Rector, which is the equivalent of a Vice-President in business terms, if you want to use that language.

It will then go to the Rector, it'll then go to the Board of Governors, and people will have every opportunity

to lobby and to go to the public, to go to the media, that's the nature of the game. And no one is surprised by that.

In terms of the way the process was done, I've said publicly in the last few days, the committee probably did shoot itself in the foot to some extent in not announcing properly back in January that it would be releasing a report on such and such a date and that it would be soliciting opinion from that point on.

The reason it didn't, I am told, is because the committee was afraid that what would happen is exactly what is happening now, that instead of having a partial group of people to be, serve in a partial think-tank, who would be trying to look at the problem from a university-wide perspective, that colleagues of these professors would be putting pressure on them to sort of lobby on their behalf, to vote along party lines, to use that example, the wording that was used a few moments ago, instead of making decisions based on what six reasonable people thought were the best interests of the entire University, all four faculties, and that is the gut of the issue.

I'll just make one final point, that the committee has to look at the interests of all four faculties. That's Engineering, Computer Science, Fine Arts, Commerce and Administration, and Arts and Science. And your guests and many of their colleagues whose opinion they are voicing

today are looking at it naturally from their point of view, from their particular interests.

And that's perfectly normal. But the University administration, and this committee, who was asked by the administration to come up with this interim report are trying to make a rational decision that will benefit the entire University, and obviously there are pros and cons. There's no right or wrong way to make these moves.

There are pros and cons. Your guests have mentioned several very valid points today, and all of these ideas will go into the hopper(?) and then eventually the decision will be made that hopefully will reflect the best interests of Concordia University and all its students and all its faculty.

MELANIE KING: Thanks very much Mr. Whittingham.

KEN WHITTINGHAM: My pleasure.

MELANIE KING: Ken Whittingham is director of public relations for Concordia University.

Thanks to you both for coming in today.

MYER VERTHUY: Thank you.

ED PECHTER: Thank you, Melanie.

MELANIE KING: Myer Verthuy is Resident Fellow at Simone de Beauvoir Institute. Ed Pechter, a professor of English at Concordia University. (LP)

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